



Identification and Management of Native American Traditional Cultural Properties at Los Alamos National Laboratory



Terry Knight and W. Bruce Masse

Physical Setting of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) is situated on the Pajarito Plateau on the eastern flanks of the Jemez Mountains in northern New Mexico. The vegetation is primarily piñon-juniper woodlands with some ponderosa pine forest.

LANL occupies an area of 27,832 acres (43 sq miles), from the banks of the Rio Grande to the base of the Jemez Mountains. About 25% of this land has been developed for various activities relating to the Department of Energy mission. The rest provides buffer zones around and between these activity areas.



Cultural Setting and Archaeological Resources

Native Americans have been present in northern New Mexico for more than 12,000 years. With the beginning of maize (Indian corn) agriculture at around 3,500 years ago (1500 BC), populations began to increase and patterns of mobility began to change. Seasonal villages were established in areas where maize and other crops could be most easily cultivated. Around 500 BC to AD 500, at least some of these villages began to be occupied on a permanent year-round basis.

About 56% of LANL has been intensively surveyed for archaeological resources. A total of 1550 archaeological sites have been documented thus far, along with hundreds of historic laboratory buildings and structures relating to the Manhattan Project and the early Cold War. Archaeological sites include: Archaic (before AD 600) camp sites; ancestral Puebloan (around AD 1150-1550) villages, garden plots, field houses, trails, petroglyphs, activity areas, and "caveate" rooms excavated into cliff faces; and historic homesteads and wagon roads dating from the late 1800s through the beginning of the Manhattan Project in 1943.

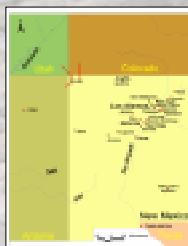


Traditional History

The present configuration of tribes and tribal lands in the American Southwest developed from AD 1000 to AD 1500, with significant changes in settlement patterns caused by responses to drought, warfare, and especially by the subsequent entry of Europeans into the Southwest after AD 1540.

Modern Native American tribes have maintained a rich legacy of historic information extending back hundreds or even thousands of years. This information is carefully preserved as sacred knowledge through their dances, rituals, and oral traditions. For example, Elders at the modern Pueblos of San Ildefonso and Santa Clara have clear traditions of some of their ancestors having lived at Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado prior to migrations into the northern Rio Grande valley and the Pajarito Plateau at around AD 1275 to AD 1325.

The importance of this sacred knowledge to individual tribes and the legitimacy of its historical basis cannot be overemphasized.



Defining Traditional Cultural Properties (TCPs) and Sacred Sites

The term "traditional" refers to practices, beliefs, and customs of a living community that have been passed down from generation to generation verbally or through practice. The role that a particular place plays in a Native American tribe's historically rooted customs, beliefs, and practices determines its traditional cultural significance. A tribe, a group of individuals within a tribe (such as a clan or other social division), or even individual tribal members may conduct traditional practices or customs.

Native American TCPs can include:

- locations associated with the traditional beliefs of a group about its origins, its cultural history, or the nature of the world
- locations where religious practitioners have historically gone, and still visit today, to perform ceremonial activities in accordance with traditional cultural rules of practice
- locations where a community has traditionally carried out economic, artistic, or other cultural practices important in maintaining its historical identity

Sacred sites represent a unique type of TCP. They have an importance that is rooted in the place itself, vested with cultural and religious value and meaning, sometimes without apparent human modification. What makes them historic properties is their connection to generations who have used them, and to the people who continue to do so. Their significance does not end at any given point in the past, but continues to the present. Mount Taylor for Acoma Pueblo and the Navajo Nation, Zuni Salt Lake for Zuni Pueblo, and the Rio Grande Sand Bars for Sandia Pueblo are examples of this type of TCP. The eastern boundaries of LANL surround a large wedge-shaped parcel of land of great spiritual and sacred importance to San Ildefonso Pueblo.

Some Native American TCPs and sacred sites may have deep cultural importance for more than a single tribe. Ancestral cultural areas sometimes overlapped or changed boundaries due to population growth or movement. Also, marriage and other social ties serve to broaden the numbers of people who are directly tied to a given TCP or sacred site. Fajada Butte in Chaco Canyon National Historical Park is such a place.

But the most important thing to understand about TCPs and Sacred Sites is that federal agencies and their cultural resources managers cannot themselves identify and define such places. Only the individual tribes themselves have the knowledge to identify and define their own TCPs and sacred sites.



The Plan for Management of TCPs

The DOE is required to manage both cultural and natural resources on LANL, and to assure that the cultural and religious concerns of Native Americans and other traditional communities are identified and addressed when making decisions about land use. If the presence, and general location, of such places is known, preservation requirements can be included early in the planning process, making future protection easier to achieve. LANL must ensure compliance with federal regulations, in particular, the *National Historic Preservation Act* (NHPA), the *Archaeological Resources Protection Act* (ARPA), the *American Indian Religious Freedom Act* (AIRFA), and *Executive Order 13007*.

LANL and DOE have developed a *Comprehensive Plan* to provide a framework for identifying TCPs and sacred sites that tribal and other ethnic communities are willing to have documented within LANL. The goal is to establish a proactive relationship between DOE, Native American tribes, and other appropriate agencies, organizations, and individuals to identify and to evaluate TCPs and sacred sites, and to manage those resources to the best of our ability in a spirit of cooperation.

The Process

DOE and LANL will consult with 24 Native American Tribes to determine whether TCPs and sacred sites are present at LANL. These "government-to-government" consultations include:

- meetings to discuss project scope and the management needs of both governments
- having each tribe assess their TCP and sacred site concerns within and adjacent to LANL
- ensuring that individual tribes maintain ownership of original TCP documentation
- working with the tribes to protect sensitive information on planning maps
- ensuring that planning information relating to TCPs and sacred sites is "Official Use Only"

TCPs information is confidential. The need to protect this information while retaining access to it for management and planning purposes is of fundamental importance. The nature of specific TCPs and their locations are not casually shared with DOE or LANL staff, or placed in public documents.

The TCP identification and management process can be broken down into five key questions to be asked of each tribe. With their help, LANL will achieve its goal of becoming a compassionate steward of its TCPs and sacred sites.

KEY TCP QUESTIONS

- ❖ Do you have ancestral ties to the Pajarito Plateau?
- ❖ Do you have ancestral ties to the lands within Los Alamos National Laboratory?
- ❖ Do these areas have traditional, spiritual, or historical significance for your people?
- ❖ Will you help us to identify and protect your traditional cultural places?
- ❖ Would you be interested in helping us develop other cultural resource planning documents?